



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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Lead Education and Abatement Program

Local Resident Discovers Lead Threat Lurking in Household Furniture

Like most East Helena residents, Donna* had her yard soil cleaned up in an effort to protect her family from lead contamination from the former Asarco smelter. Still, she didn't feel like that was enough when it came to the health of her young son.

"I wanted to make sure he wasn't being exposed to any health hazard that I wasn't aware of," she said. "You can never be too cautious when it comes to your children."

Donna heard about the free blood lead screenings offered through the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department's Lead Education and Abatement Program (LEAP) and decided to sign him up.

His blood lead level proved to be within the acceptable range, which at the time was anything under 10 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood. But it was still on the high side. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently lowered the "reference value" to 5 micrograms because of increasing evidence that even children with blood lead levels below 10 micrograms sometimes experience adverse health effects.

Where was her son being exposed to lead? Donna asked herself. Could there be lead-based paint in their home?

She decided to schedule a free environmental assessment with the LEAP, to get to the bottom of the mystery. LEAP staff checked her home for lead content using a portable X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analyzer. They found no lead-based paint on walls or other painted surfaces.

What they did find was a surprise to all. The glass panels on her living room coffee table, end tables, hutch, and TV stand were soldered with lead, causing a reading of more than 10 times the level considered to be a lead-based surface.

Donna's young son was in contact with this furniture regularly, and frequently put his hands and mouth on the soldered glass panels while watching TV. Once the family knew of the problem they promptly replaced the glass panels.

"Without this (LEAP) program, we would have never known that our boy was being exposed to lead in our furniture," Donna said. "With this simple fix, we've eliminated his exposure to this potential lead hazard. We are so grateful for the LEAP staff's caring attitude."

Even though most of the residential yards in East Helena have been cleaned up, the LEAP staff want to remind residents to be vigilant. Lead hazards are not only associated with the obvious yard soils and lead-based paint.

If you would like to schedule a free environmental assessment and/or blood lead screening, please call Debb or Jan at the LEAP office, 457-8583.

**The name has been changed to protect privacy.*